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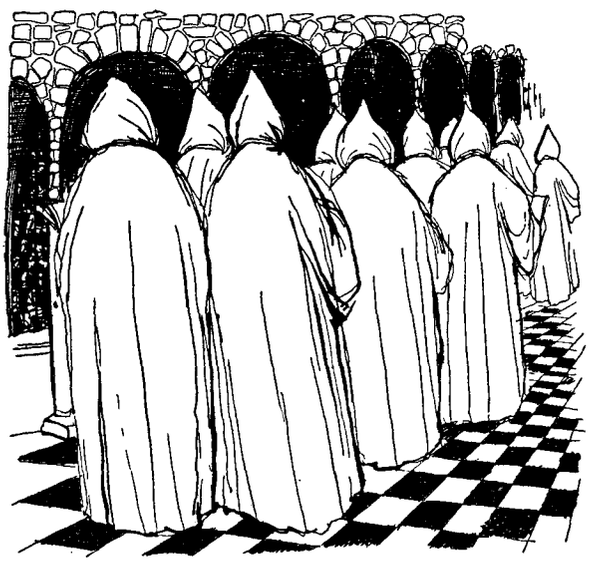
THE

Commonweal



The Psalms As Poetry

by Thomas Merton

Henry Rago Dan Herr

Helen C. White John W. Simons Jean Holzhauer

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THE LAST ARCHBISHOP TO BE HANGED—

so far—was Blessed Oliver Plunkett, Archbishop of Dublin. Apart from this detail, his case might be a pattern for any iron-curtain trial—conveniently discovered plot, manufactured evidence, disreputable witnesses and all. There is something hair-raising about finding that they did that sort of thing so well in seventeenth century London. In **THE TRIAL OF OLIVER PLUNKETT** ($3) **Alice Curtayne** tells the story with great mastery, using the verbatim record of the trial, letters, and other contemporary documents. It's a fascinating tale, if appalling. We specially liked the occasional cracks in the evidence through which the truth threatened to appear—the acute embarrassment, for instance, of the man sent to Ireland to find incriminating documents, who carelessly left them behind in an English inn, and had them discovered for him . . .

ARE WE REALLY TEACHING RELIGION? is the title of a 75c pamphlet by **F. J. Sheed.** He gave a talk on this topic to a conference of teaching Sisters in Ireland a couple of summers ago, and they have been circulating rough copies of it ever since. They have also been pointing out bitterly that the author could perfectly well get the thing printed and save them this trouble. No doubt the stream of letters he has been getting, asking for further explanations of particular points, has helped him to see their point of view. Anyway, here it is: the original talk with the most asked-for explanations added.

ROCK OF TRUTH by **Daphne Pochin Mould** ($3.25) is the conversion story of a girl who really fought to get off St. Peter's hook. A young English geologist, cheerfully atheistic, she went to Scotland on some geological business or other, and there became interested in St. Columcille. From the events that followed, we can only suppose that St. Columcille became interested in her too: anyhow, do what she would, and rage as she might, she was drawn steadily nearer to the Church, until the monks at Fort Augustus finally landed her. You will find she is excellent company.

All these books are already published. The following three, the last of the season, come on November 11th:

ONLY SON ($3.50) is the life of Our Lord on which **Father Walter Farrell, O. P.** was working when he died. It has been completed by the addition of chapters on the Passion and Resurrection from Father Farrell's own ***Companion to the Summa.*** **THE THEOLOGY OF THE SPIRITUAL LIFE** ($4.50) is by **Joseph de Guibert, S. J.,** who was Professor of Ascetical and Mystical Theology at the Gregorian University until his death in 1942. This translation of his great work is intended to supply the need for a book on the spiritual life which is at once theological, scientific and practical. Last comes **THERESE OF LISIEUX** by **Hans Urs Von Balthasar** ($3.50) the first book on St. Therese written from a theologian's point of view. It made us gasp and stretch our eyes like the people in Mr. Belloc's poem to find that, though he is devoted to her, he does not regard her as by any means a little blueprint for perfection. Her upbringing and unrecognized faults, he says, made it very difficult for her to deliver the tremendously important new teaching which God wanted her to give to the world. In fact, the girl was human. Our devotion to her rose sharply.

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THE
Commonweal
week by week

INDIAN VILLAGE

WHEN a genuine bomb goes off in a world of fireworks, the deafened public shrugs. The prisoner exchange in Korea has been a bomb explosion in our bitter times, a singular and enlightening event. And it is likely to be shrugged off both by battle-hardened Occidentals and stubbornly ideological Asians.

If the Asians ignore it, it will be a major tragedy, for South Asia is in need of the kind of lesson Europe learned some time ago, and that we Americans are learning today after costly experience: the lesson that theories are not the same things as facts; that the infinite variety, mystery, stubbornness, and darkness of humanity are not comprehensible in the orderly formulae of orderly minds; that humility is a good thing.

India has followed a course in the cold war which has been, at the least, respectable and understandable. It has tried to take nothing at face value, to be outside the cold war if possible, and to be an honest broker if participation was inevitable. Unfortunately, India's intellectual leaders seem to have equated these admirable intentions with triumphant accomplishment, and consequently have frequently spoken with really remarkable arrogance.

India agreed to chairman the Neutral Nations Repatriation Commission with what was, apparently, a tolerant assumption that once the well-known honest Indians were on the scene, justice would prevail. Mr. Nehru and his advisers took it for granted that the Americans (naturally) were forcibly detaining the disputed prisoners, and that the prisoners really wanted to go home under the sponsorship of their friendly big brothers, the Indians.

So the Indians sent superb infantry troops to manage the interviews. They were magnificently disciplined, stern yet tactful. They needed to be. The Chinese and Korean prisoners spat on them, and rioted against them.

This, according to newspaper reports, was a considerable shock to New Delhi. But the Indian capacity for rationalization is no less than our own, and the prisoners' attitude was laid to the influence of Chinese Nationalist and South Korean agents, and to United States propaganda. And there was plausibility in this, because the South Koreans and Chinese Nationalists had propagandized the prisoners, and American psychological warfare officers, many of whom are pretty cynical about the Indians, had briefed the prisoners on the dark prospects they faced under Indian control. So the Indians explained it away, and buttressed their presuppositions.

Then, after considerable difficulty, came the first interviews. One by one, Chinese prisoners faced the Communist interviewers. The Communist officers greeted the prisoners politely, and told them: "We are here to welcome you back to the arms of the people of China. Your parents and your future await you." And one by one the prisoners interrupted, raged, and threatened the Communists. "You are Russian slaves!" "My parents are dead, there is no future for me with you!" "Betrayers of China!" "Dogs of the Soviet Union!" After the first day, two per cent of the prisoners had gone back to Communism. The rest, left alone for five minutes in a room with two exits, one to China, one to further confinement and eventual release in a neutral country, had chosen the latter door and cast their lot privately and finally with the West.

AND so the neutral Indians have had two lessons. Perhaps the second will be rationalized away as was the first. Perhaps, on the other hand, the Indian leaders will finally admit that they were wrong. If they take this event to heart, recognizing with humility the enormous decision made by these prisoners, to be men without a country, exiles, then this will have been a significant occasion in the cold war. For South Asia is probably the chief Communist target in the world today, and the governments of Burma and India have been dogmatically neutral towards the Communists. One may hope that the prisoner exchange gives them an insight into Communist China which theory cannot give.

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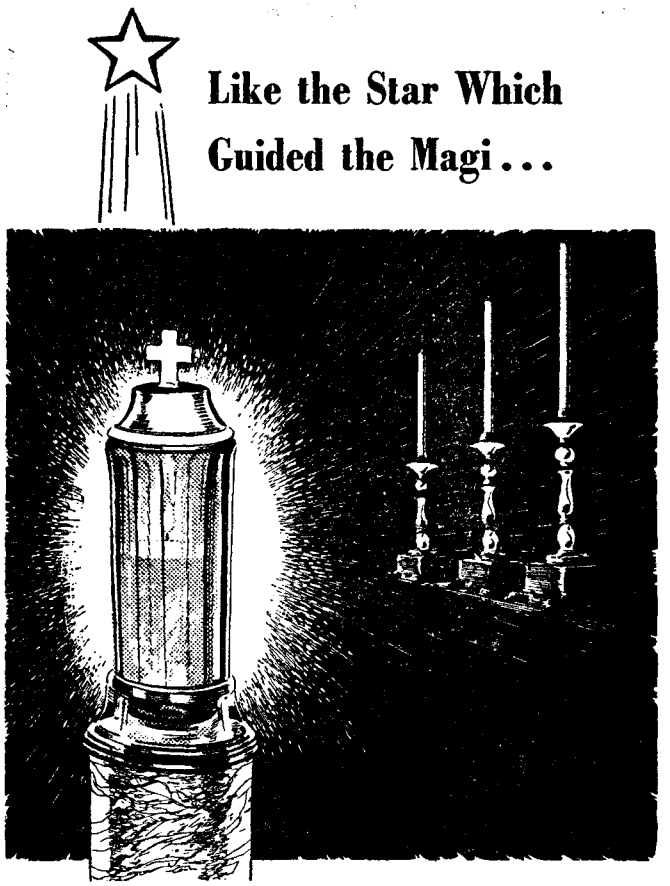

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It is a slim hope, but a worthy one. And one may hope, too, that we Americans will see here our terrible failure to make our case intelligible in South Asia. We are still automatically suspect; we are still the strangers to the East.

MITCHELL FOR DURKIN

THERE is no doubt that the new Secretary of Labor, James P. Mitchell, begins his job under a considerable handicap. The Durkin affair seriously hurt the Administration in labor circles, and, justly or unjustly, Mr. Mitchell is going to have to suffer for it.

One way or another, a great deal has been made out of Mr. Durkin's resignation. The AFL, in particular, seems bent on making Mr. Durkin's cause its own, a fact which is not surprising in view of Mr. Durkin's AFL affiliations. Despite all the heated words that have been hurled, however, it still seems that the root of the trouble may be found in an honest difference of opinion on amending the Taft-Hartley law. Mr. Durkin apparently thought he had a firm commitment from the President on what form the amendments should take. Mr. Eisenhower did not think so, and in a case like this, in which all observers are agreed on the absolute integrity of both men, it seems logical to believe that the disagreement resulted from a misunderstanding rather than any deliberate betrayal or false testimony. We fail to see the reasoning behind the AFL's continued insistence that the President backed down on a pledge made to Mr. Durkin.

This Administration is quite obviously somewhat weighted with "business-minded" officials. But labor has nothing to gain and much to lose from continuing to hold a grudge on the Durkin affair. Walter Reuther has remarked that the new Secretary of Labor has a "good reputation" among labor people, and he has offered Mr. Mitchell every cooperation in efforts to strengthen the Labor Department. Under the circumstances, Mr. Reuther's attitude seems the most constructive, and other union officials should join him in giving Mr. Mitchell a chance to show what he can do in his new post. Certainly the nation would be poorly served by four years of guerrilla warfare between unions and the office of the Secretary of Labor.

DANGER IN LATIN AMERICA

THE nations of the other Americas have accepted low priority on technical and economic assistance now for a number of years. During the war the need for postponement was obvious enough. Shortly afterward the Soviet Union showed itself in its true colors, and a large-scale development program in Latin America had again to be deferred while the defenses of Western Europe—with its strategic preeminence and industrial capacity—were built up. When war broke out in Korea, there was further excuse for delay.

Consequently there is little headway to report in the lands to the south of us. The technical assistance recommended there by Dr. Milton Eisenhower as a result of his recent mission amounts to but twenty-three millions a year, a ten per cent increase and peak figure at that. Emergency sums are also being despatched to Bolivia to avert a national crisis resulting from a sharp drop in the price of tin. Reciprocal trade agreements are in force for another year. Nelson Rockefeller states that since the war the Latin American economy has increased by two and a half per cent a year—at a faster rate than the United States. But such a comparison overlooks the depressed state of that economy to begin with—the high incidence of poverty, illiteracy, malnutrition, disease and low productivity in Latin America.

Such is the background for the recent disturbances in Guatemala and British Guiana and for their widespread support from neighboring lands. Without for the moment going into the extent to which Moscow was involved in either situation, both the struggle with the United Fruit Company and the unrest of the British colonials should focus attention on the condition of the masses below the Rio Grande. Soviet agents have there a most fertile field for operations. And a strong foothold anywhere in the Americas is certain to serve as a base for further incursions.

Communism, of course, constitutes a threat in military, political and spiritual terms. Soviet strongholds in Latin America would indeed confront the United States with a grave security problem. They would also be highly damaging politically to this country's international prestige. They would further imply that our democratic ideals are so poorly implemented as far as Latin Americans are concerned that a totalitarian ideal has been able to appear comparatively the more attractive. That chronic fear of "Yankee imperialism" is always a big factor does not make such antagonism against the United States any more palatable.

Such are some of the stakes at next month's Inter-American conference meeting in Venezuela where the United States seeks to place "intervention of international Communism in the American republics" on the agenda. They indicate why charges of "Communism" provide little answer to national and social unrest in lands where the United States has

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special hemispheric responsibility—not to mention the direct responsibility stemming from the fact that our steamship, oil, mining and other companies employ so many Latin American workers in undertakings that are normally quite profitable. "Statesmanship" may be a formula which is trotted out too often to meet international emergencies. But present conditions in Latin America could hardly bring the need for it more forcibly to mind.

PEOPLE

THE Trieste affair kept Premier Pella of Italy from attending the recent meeting of the Inter-Governmental Committee for European Immigration. But he did send a sober message about a problem which in the long run is likely to have much more to do with the peace of the world than the headline-capturing events at Trieste.

In his message Premier Pella appealed to the world to take a realistic look at the fact that Italy today has an excess population of about four million people who cannot now or in the foreseeable future be absorbed by the Italian economy. Four million people in Italy alone, and other European nations face the same problem in varying degrees. The staggering dimensions of the problem are indicated by the fact that last year the Committee was able to resettle only eighty-five thousand persons; next year it hopes to take care of one hundred and fifteen thousand.

On this matter Premier Pella is certainly correct. If it is to be solved, all the Western nations will have to show more vision and more courage than they have hitherto done. What is needed is readiness to explore the untried solution and willingness to sacrifice short-range national goods for the long-range peace of the world. If these are lacking, the problem will continue to be by-passed.

NEXT WEEK

SEYMOUR KRIM writes about George Bernard Shaw and his critics.

"Shaw defiantly propagandized for Wagner, Ibsen, Tolstoy, Marx and other major nineteenth century figures because he had learned so much from them himself, and was too impatient to let their value be decided by history. In fact it can be said that Shaw was not so much concerned with the intrinsic value of ideas but in their immediate application—the bringing of his special heaven to earth. His zeal in behalf of the men and ideas he admired appeared selfless; but because he identified himself so completely with his gods, injustice or apathy on the part of the public was taken by Shaw as a personal insult."

CHIEF JUSTICE WARREN

MOST newspapers and magazines have by now commented on the appointment of Mr. Earl Warren as Chief Justice of the United States. The overwhelming opinion seems to be that in making the appointment President Eisenhower acted wisely. The few dissents registered have themselves been a kind of corroboration of this verdict, for they have been made by an extremist minority on the Left and Right—from the editors of the *Nation* to Mr. David Lawrence.

Harry S. Truman once said that Earl Warren was really a Democrat but didn't know it. There is justification for his remark. Certainly many Democrats in California—including some "Fair Deal" Democrats—would endorse it, for they joined with Republicans to make Mr. Warren a uniquely bi-partisan figure in American politics. As Governor of California he practiced a "middle of the road" statesmanship which attracted support from both parties. A constitutionally non-doctrinaire man, he appealed to all but the doctrinaire.

Mr. Warren has proved to be more than a "middle of the roader," however, and this is encouraging, for more than an ability to please both sides will be demanded of him as Chief Justice. He has shown that besides being a man of moderation he is also a man of vision and courage. At a time when most of his party was busy denouncing "creeping socialism," he advocated a system of public health insurance; at the very beginning of McCarthy's rise to national influence he repudiated McCarthyism; and in his opposition to the compulsory loyalty oath at the University of California he set an example to the nation.

These, of course, are positions which this magazine would endorse. Mr. Warren has taken other positions with which we would disagree. But this merely indicates that he is not an easy man to categorize—that he is, indeed, independent.

Mr. Warren has had no previous judicial experience and this is a point in his disfavor. All things considered, however, the record indicates that his other qualifications will fill this deficiency. We do not know if he will be a great Chief Justice, but we think that he will almost certainly be a good one. We wish him a long and distinguished career as a jurist.

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The Psalms As Poetry

"SINCE THEY ARE POEMS, THE FUNCTION OF THE PSALMS IS TO MAKE US SHARE IN THE POETIC EXPERIENCE OF THE MEN WHO WROTE THEM."

THOMAS MERTON

THE PSALMS are poems, and poems have a meaning—although the poet has no obligation to make his meaning immediately clear to anyone who does not want to make an effort to discover it. But to say that poems have meaning is not to say that they must necessarily convey practical information or an explicit message.

In poetry, words are charged with meaning in a far different way than are the words in a piece of scientific prose. The words of a poem are not merely the signs of concepts: they are also rich in affective and spiritual associations. The poet uses words not merely to make declarations, statements of fact. That is usually the last thing that concerns him. He seeks above all to put words together in such a way that they exercise a mysterious and vital reactivity among themselves, and so release their secret content of associations to produce in the reader an experience that enriches the depths of his spirit in a manner quite unique.

A good poem induces an experience that could not be produced by any other combination of words. It is therefore an entity that stands by itself, graced with an individuality that marks it off from every other work of art. Like all great works of art, true poems seem to live by a life entirely their own. What we must seek in a poem is therefore not an accidental reference to something outside itself: we must seek this inner principle of individuality and of life which is its soul, or "form."

What the poem actually "means" can only be summed up in the whole content of poetic experience which it is capable of producing in the reader. This total poetic experience is what the poet is trying to communicate to the rest of the world.

It is supremely important for those who read the Psalms and chant them in the public prayer of the Church to grasp, if they can, the poetic content of these great songs. The poetic gift is not one that has been bestowed on all men with equal lavishness and that gift is unfortunately necessary not only for the writers of poems but also, to some extent, for those who read them. This does not mean that the recitation of the Divine Office is an aesthetic recreation whose full possibilities can only be realized by initiates endowed with refined taste and embellished by a certain artistic cultivation. But it does mean that the type of reader whose poetic appetites are fully satisfied by the Burma Shave rhymes along our American highways may find it rather hard to get anything out of the Psalms. I believe, however, that the reason why so many fail to understand the Psalms—beyond the fact that they are never quite at home even with Church Latin—is that latent poetic faculties have never been awakened in their spirits by someone capable of pointing out to them that the Psalms really are poems.

Since, then, they are poems, the function of the Psalms is to make us share in the poetic experience of the men who wrote them. No matter how carefully and how scientifically we may interpret the words of the Psalms, and study their historical background, if these investigations do not help us to enter into the poetic experience which the Psalms convey, they are of limited value in showing us what God has revealed in the Psalms, for the revealed content of the Psalter is *poetic*.

Let it therefore be clear, that since the inspired writer is an instrument of the Holy Spirit, Who, according to the Catholic Faith, is the true Author of the Psalms, what is revealed in the Psalter is revealed in the *poetry* of the Psalter and is only fully apprehended in a poetic experience that is analogous to the experience of the inspired writer. However, when I speak of the poetry of the Psalter and the content conveyed by its poetic form, I do not mean to imply that it is necessary for everyone to read or recite the Psalms in the original Hebrew, in which alone they possess their authentic and integral artistic form. I imagine that every contemplative would, at one time or other, wish that he could chant the Psalms in the same language they were chanted by Jesus on this earth, and in which He quoted them when He was dying on the Cross! This is a longing that very few of us will ever be able to satisfy. But it is accidental.

Actually, the simplicity and universality of the Psalms

Father Merton is a monk of Our Lady of Gethsemani Abbey. This article forms part of "Bread in the Wilderness," to be published next month by New Directions.

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as poetry makes them accessible to every mind, in every age and in any tongue and I believe that one's poetic sense must be unusually deadened if one has never at any time understood the Psalms without being in some way moved by their deep and universal religious quality.

THE Psalms are more than poems: they are *religious* poems. This means that the experience which they convey, and which the reader must try to share, is not only a poetic but a religious experience.

Religious poetry—as distinct from merely devotional verse—is poetry that springs from a true religious experience. I do not necessarily mean a mystical experience. Devotional poetry is verse which manipulates

religious themes and which does so, perhaps, even on a truly poetic level. But the experiential content of the poem is at best poetic only. Sometimes it is not even that. Much of what passes for "religious" verse is simply the rearrangement of well known devotional formulas, without any personal poetic assimilation at all. It is a game, in which souls, no doubt sincere in their piety, play poetic checkers with a certain number of familiar devotional clichés. This activity is prompted by a fundamentally religious intention, if the poem be written for the glory of God or for the salvation of souls. But such poems rarely "save" any souls. They flatter those who are comfortably "saved" but irritate the ones who really need salvation.

A truly religious poem is not born merely of a religious purpose. Neither poetry nor contemplation is built out of good intentions. Indeed, a poem that springs from no deeper spiritual need than a devout intention will necessarily appear to be at the same time forced and tame. Art that is simply "willed" is not art, and it tends to have the same disquieting effect upon the reader as forced piety and religious strain in those who are trying hard to be contemplatives, as if infused contemplation were the result of human effort rather than a gift of God. It seems to me that such poetry were better not written. It tends to confirm unbelievers in their suspicion that religion deadens instead of nurtures all that is vital in the spirit of man. The Psalms, on the other hand, are at the same time the simplest and the greatest of all religious poems.

No one will question the truly religious content of the Psalms. They are the songs of men—and David was the greatest of them—for whom God was more than an abstract idea, more than a frozen watchmaker sitting in his tower while his universe goes ticking away into space without him. Nor is the God of the Psalms simply an absolute, immanent Being spinning forth from some deep metaphysical womb an endless pageantry of phenomena. The Psalms are not incantations to lull us to sleep in such a one.

THE human symbolism of the Psalter, primitive and simple as it is, should not deceive us into thinking David had an "anthropomorphic" God. Such a mistake could only be made by materialists who had lost all sense of poetic form and who, moreover, had forgotten the violent insistence of the great Jewish prophets on the transcendence, the infinite spirituality of Jaweh, Who was so far above all things imaginable that He did not even have an utterable name. The God of the Psalter is "above all gods," that is to say, above anything that could possibly be represented and adored in an image. To one who can penetrate the poetic content of the Psalter, it is clear that David's concept of God was utterly pure. And yet this God, Who is "above all the heavens," is "near to those who call upon Him." He Who is above all things is also in all things, and He is capable of manifesting Himself through them all.

The men who wrote the Psalms were carried away in an ecstasy of joy when they saw God in the cosmic symbolism of His created universe.

The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament proclaims the work of his hands.
Day unto day heralds the message, and night unto night makes it known.
There is no speech nor words, whose voice is not heard:
Their sound goes forth unto all the earth, and their strains unto the farthest bounds of the world.
There he has set his tabernacle for the sun, which like to the bridegroom coming out from the bridal chamber, he exults like a giant to run his course.
His going forth is from one end of the heavens, and his circuit ends at the other . . .
Praise ye the Lord from the heavens, praise ye him in the high places.
Praise ye him, all his angels, praise ye him, all his hosts.

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Praise ye him, O sun and moon, praise him, all ye shining stars.
Praise him, ye heavens of heavens, and ye waters that are above the heavens:
Let them praise the name of the Lord, for he commanded and they were created,
And he established them for ever and ever: he gave a decree, which shall not pass away.
Praise the Lord from the earth, ye sea-monsters and all ye depths of the sea.
Fire and hail, snow and mist, stormy wind, that fulfil his word,
Mountains and all hills, fruitful trees and all cedars,
Beasts and all cattle, serpents and feathered fowls,
Kings of the earth and all people, princes and all judges of the earth,
Young men and even maidens, old men together with children:
Let them praise the name of the Lord, for his name alone is exalted.

ALTHOUGH we tend to look upon the Old Testament as a chronicle of fear in which men were far from their God, we forget how many of the patriarchs and prophets seem to have walked with God with some of the intimate simplicity of Adam in Eden. This is especially evident in the first days of the Patriarchs, of which the Welsh metaphysical poet Henry Vaughan speaks when he says:

My God, when I walke in those groves,
And leaves thy spirit doth still fan,
I see in each shade that there growes
An Angell talking with a man
Under a juniper *some house,*
Or the coole mirtles *canopie,*
Others beneath an oakes *greene boughs,*
Or at some fountaines *bubling Eye;*
Here Jacob *dreames, and wrestles; there*
Elias *by a Raven is fed,*
Another time by th' Angell, where
He brings him water with his bread;
In Abr'hams *Tent the winged guests*
(O how familiar then was heaven!)
Eate, drinke, discourse, sit downe, and rest
Untill the Coole, and shady even.

As age succeeded age the memory of this primitive revelation of God seems to have withered away, but its leaf is still green in the Psalter. David is drunk with the love of God and filled with the primitive sense that man is the *Leitourgos* or the high priest of all creation, born with the function of uttering in "Liturgy" the whole testimony of praise which mute creation cannot of itself offer to its God.

CATHOLICISM IN AMERICA XIII

Catholics and Literature

HENRY RAGO

I TAKE it that we are talking about literature in an unqualified sense: simply literature, trying to be as good as it can possibly be. And so, first of all, we have to be clear that such literature would have the same struggle with American Catholics that it has with Americans generally.

The market still belongs to the clever approximation; the processed rather than the genuine. Not that there are no inroads. The national culture is something that history has never seen before: a thing of forced growth, developing under extraordinary pressures. Out of this surely comes all the vulgarity that the reformers have an easy time ridiculing, but at the same time the phenomenon of the paper-back classic sold in the hundreds of thousands for thirty-five cents. And first-rate fiction (along with third-rate of course) appears more and more often in the family magazines; and I am not thinking merely of *The New Yorker*. Perhaps it appears *more* often in such magazines than it does in the more specialized literary journals, where, for good reason, the experiment is usually more interesting than the achievement.

Let me not say any more than I mean to say. A fine piece of work can be given a great market while its deepest excellences continue to go unnoticed. What gets the praise may be the high finish; what gets permission in the first place may be the subject-matter and the *décor*. Much remains unpraised; much remains impermissible. We have to say too that the recognition goes to the already recognized: to the writer who has

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already won his battle, or to the kind of treatment that at last has become familiar. Often the scores of imitators, diluting the genuine article with just the right mixture, are well-fed precursors for the real precursor. The good writer who is new—genuinely new—to the public is still difficult; and every time he comes along, in this person or that, he will be difficult. Even at the universities, in America as elsewhere, the new in literature will have to struggle for understanding or even for a reading.

As for the new in poetry, the less said the better. There is no need for anyone to be ill-tempered about this. Poetry, new or old, is strenuous reading. One is pleased and perhaps even a little surprised to come upon people who do read it. One is pleased to find even a novelist who reads it, or a scholar; even a scholar in English literature, if it is new poetry that he is reading. I mean if it is poetry that has not been explained. It is nobody's *business* to read it; not even the English scholar's. Naturally I would like a lot of people to read it—for their sake and for the sake of my fellow-poets. And I think that a few more people would enjoy reading it if they tried. But because poetry, at its most typical, is always making an idiom where hitherto there was no idiom, I know what its difficulties are; and I do not think that the Good Society depends on everybody's reading poetry.

For literature from its more popular to its less popular forms, the situation then is one of general resistance, with such progress as we can hopefully and perhaps too eagerly detect. In all this the American Catholic will share as he shares in American culture generally. Up to this point we see him only as part of the statistics in the common problem of the "general reader" in America.

It is here that we can begin to see the *peculiar* complication which he brings to this problem. I would say that it is a threefold complication, and I see it best in terms of two vices and one virtue.

One vice might well be called the Double Standard. There is literature and then, *miserere*, there is "Catholic" literature. Literature has to be good; Catholic literature has to be "Catholic." It is as if one read each of these literatures with a separate sensibility; or, where "Catholic" literature is concerned, with *in*sensibility. In its best practice, this tendency causes even a good Catholic writer to be praised in grotesque disproportion to his true merit, and at the same time it denies him the professional standards which, as a matter of both pride and honesty, he would want to be measured by. In its worst practice this vice would lead one to think that the sacrament of baptism even when received fairly late in life, forgave not only mortal and venial sins but also faults of style.

How stubborn this habit of judgment is, I do not have to tell the conscientious teacher in the Catholic universities or the conscientious critic in the few literate Catholic magazines. They and their small audience find themselves in the ungrateful role of dissenters, scolds, or prophets of Culture, constantly having to repeat what is as boring for them as it is annoying to others, all in the simple business of trying to be honest.

I have put it this way—in terms of honesty—because I do not think that any Movement needs to be started, any battle fought, or any reform made in the name of Culture. I am not urging the importance of esthetic values; I am only urging honesty in judging them when one sets about judging them at all. There is no question of a choice between art and piety; the choice for a Christian is quite clearly decided; although I do not think that the choice arises, in authentic terms, as frequently as we are led to think when we read "Catholic" criticism. Even when the choice is made, we should be doubly careful not to confuse piety with art by praising the vulgar for the sake of piety but in the name of art: that is no choice at all but an attempt to have it both ways.

IDEALLY the choice need not be made. Piety is free of the demands of art not by cheating those demands but by transcending them. Surely there are the special purposes of devotional reading; and those purposes are quite apart from and quite superior to esthetic pleasure. But if the purpose is high, so much the greater insult to it if the writer or the reader cheats to attain it. Saint Augustine does not cheat. Saint John of the Cross does not cheat. Distortion, exaggeration, sentimentality, these are distractions from contemplation, not helps to it; in them a man only flatters himself or does something far worse: for I think there is a sense in which one can speak of flattering God. Flattery is not praise but the *use* of praise. These are contraries: for praise gives and flattery solicits; praise rejoices in truth, and flattery makes its own truth; praise comes from faith, flattery from the lack of it.

In the light of this the Double Standard begins to show itself as Multiple. There is the tendency to divide literature into two parts, the shabbier part being "Catholic," and within that section to divide it again in order to get a separate esthetic standard—or no esthetic standard at all—for devotional reading. Even further divisions might be possible and in fact are implicitly made: for the notion of a Catholic literature is at best ambiguous.

Is it literature *by* Catholics? On any subject at all, including some of the *obiter dicta* I have seen appearing in the same advertisement with patristics and hagiography? Apparently some special standard canonizes even the most casual scribblings of the Guaranteed Catholic Author. Is it literature *for* Catholics but not necessarily *by* Catholics? I think I have seen such

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literature given even more special treatment, usually in some form whereby the reader manages to congratulate both the author and himself. The Holy Spirit breathes where It will, but there is an ever vigilant cheering section capable of following these manifestations and even attempting to direct them. The Scripture tells us to rejoice for the lost sheep brought home; but when the cheers express a wish for the slick triumph in argument, the hit with the newspapers, the proprietorship over the truth rather than the humble living in the faith of it, I rather suspect that what we have is not a lost sheep but a golden calf.

Or is Catholic literature (if one must use the term at all) any work in which there is some implication of the Christian concept of man? If this is so, we can leave our discussion of the Double Standard, now Multiple, and turn to the second vice, not unrelated to it. Let us call it Xenophobia.

Literature is many countries and many ages and many beliefs, clear or clouded. It has its own legitimacy and its own goodness; it is its own world and an extraordinary one, for merely to enter is to be enfranchised. It asks us to make no excuses for our coming to it, except the wonder and delight which it promises. The entrance can be made only in the same spirit. Its full skies and its full landscape will not open to those who do not *wish* to enter; or to those who enter without the wish; I mean to say, by force. Those who would take it over in the name of politics, or psychology, or anthropology, or even religion are using force. Oddly enough, they will not even get what they are looking for.

Religious values, in their full depth and complexity, cannot be wrenched from literature without some feeling for the art and some sense of its tradition in its full scope. The point (again) is not whether literature is important or unimportant; if anything, I would argue that literature is relatively unimportant; this is a way of saying that it is not religion or even the confirmation of religion.

The point here is the tendency among American Catholics, and not only the uninstructed, to refuse the exploration of literature on these terms. I leave it to others to discuss the basic sociology of which this is only one manifestation. The tendency as it concerns us here is Puritanical, negativistic, defensive, and rather nervous. Obviously these characteristics go a long way toward explaining the Double Standard as well as Xenophobia. And I can wonder sometimes whether they are the result of one's having faith or the result of one's *not* having quite as much faith as he would like to think he had.

RECENTLY a colleague at the University where I teach told me that he had met one of my friends at a meeting of a philosophical association. My colleague was greatly impressed to meet a priest so thoroughly inside the problems of contemporary philosophy and so open to their consideration in the terms they demand. I understood my colleague's surprise, but in my own feelings there was no surprise at all. A man of genuine faith and genuine charity does not need cheap assurances, nor does he need to strain for intellectual generosity. Such a man is free, and the center of his freedom is not a philosophy; it is not even a theology; it is faith, which is infinitely beyond both. Paradoxically this faith can make philosophy most truly itself: the love of wisdom. Love is the opposite of fear.

As with philosophy, so, surely, with literature. Although literature has its own subtle relations to truth, its claims on truth are more humble than those of philosophy. If philosophy begins with wonder, literature is content to end where philosophy begins; for literature asks us not to judge a possibility but only to delight in it; not to believe but to wonder.

I mention the "subtle relations to truth" without analyzing them; they would require a complete disquisition on a problem which has exercised most of the critics of our time; I give the problem no treatment rather than an unjust and distorted simplification. It is enough to say here that "truth" does not guarantee literary merit, nor does literary merit guarantee "truth." I am afraid that literature simply has to be read before it can be judged for "truth."

I intended that after talking about two vices I would talk of one virtue. That virtue should now be obvious; we have been assuming it all through this discussion, and it has been making itself more and more clear as the center of the entire problem. The virtue is Christian faith. We have already seen it in its distortions. But we have been seeing also that in its purity it is the very poise and the very freedom of the free mind. It comes to literature, as it comes to everything, with complete largesse; it can afford literature as it can afford everything; it is the acceptance of all that is.

The Christian will find deeper reason than Terence had for saying that nothing human is alien to him. By the central mystery of the Incarnation, he has commitments everywhere and in everything; he will refuse nothing; as the Logos, which is his life, refuses no history. If he suffers amid the divisions of the secular movements of his time, it is in the division itself that his suffering is most profound; it is in what these movements *refuse*. He will not bargain with literature or with anything else in the world to give him what only his faith can give him completely; and he will love literature more, for loving it freely.

This is the ideal. In the incomparably humble problem of reading literature, it manifests itself where it manifests itself. For most of us, it is best described as a virtuality rather than as a virtue. One mentions it not as a fact of history but as a hope.

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MEANWHILE, by and large, the hope is not lived up to. The best critics in America are, most of them, not Catholic. The most pure-minded reading of literature is done, generally speaking, at the non-Catholic universities. And the best way to see so nebulous a matter as the place of the Catholic among the more literate "general readers" is to reflect that the serious Catholic writer in America writes "for" an audience which is chiefly non-Catholic. I am not adept at statistics but even in these broad statements I am trying to take into account the fact that Catholics are a minority in this country.

Nor can I soften these remarks by agreement with those who speak of a Catholic literary revival. I do not think it exists in America. We can say that there is a handful of good writers who are Catholics; only a handful; and since we are concerned with reading rather than writing, the most we can say is that the best of them refuse an easy reading, so that in reading them at all the Catholic must become aware of literary values in their own right. This may be a circumstance which was not present in the typical Catholic predilections of, say, twenty or thirty years ago. The circumstance is reinforced by the demands which a handful of English and French Catholic writers also make on their readers. But this *is* a circumstance, not necessarily a sign of anything greater to come; and even as a circumstance it has only to be placed in the long history of literature to indicate an epoch somewhat less than luminous. The French contribution would seem greatest. But I would say that the "revival" in France is much more intellectual than artistic. Among the creative writers I see only one artist of the magnitude of Valéry, Proust, and Gide; that is Paul Claudel.

But it should be clear that the question of a Catholic literary revival is largely irrelevant, except as it would induce more Catholics to read. The dangers of so special an inducement also ought to be clear. (I cannot help noticing that the inducement itself is somewhat questionable, even on its own grounds: if it is a question of reading literature for a Christian view of life, I would spend very little time with some of the writers who are frequently mentioned in connection with a Catholic literary revival, and I would find much more completeness and compassion in the work of writers who happen not to be Catholic.)

The inducement to literature should be literature. The *interference* with it can be left to the rationalists, the short-term optimists, the partisans of political slogans, and the "socio-psychological" critics impetuous to decide what is "healthy" and what is "unhealthy." All these have been active in their operations on modern literature. Each is a dogmatist not because he has a dogma he believes but because he has a dogma he wishes to *institutionalize,* and he would like to take literature over for the purpose. But literature is not to be possessed; it is to be enjoyed. In the Epilogue to *The Tempest* it is the pure delight of the audience—the applause of their "good hands"—that sets Prospero free and enables the play to be complete. Here wisdom defers to joy, and perhaps this pure joy is its own kind of wisdom.

CATHOLICISM IN AMERICA XIV

Reading and Writing

DAN HERR

ALTHOUGH it is the fashion these days among status-viewers to take a definitely gloomy view of the present position of American Catholics, I must confess that the reading situation among Catholics seems to me much brighter than most of us had hoped for even ten years ago. I mean, of course, that more and more Catholics have discovered—well, let's say the shameful words and be done with it—Catholic books.

For many years now Catholic writers, critics, and teachers have been engaged in an ivory-tower revival meeting featuring shrill debate over what might be loosely described as art-for-art's sake versus art-for-salvation's sake, changing pace from time to time by locking jaws over the terms "Catholic writer" and "Catholic book." Meanwhile an increasing number of Catholic laymen, ignorant of this death-struggle, have quietly exhibited a rather marked interest in Catholic reading—unaware that there is no such thing, or if there is there shouldn't be.

I might as well admit right now that I have little sympathy with all this nose-looking-down, back-bending, and soul-searching about Catholic books prevalent today. To listen to some Catholics you would think it a social error that we admit such categories as Catholic books and Catholic writers. Granting the need to fight any further trend toward separatism or the so-called

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"ghetto complex," granting that we still suffer from the seemingly inevitable consequences of a minority status, granting that too many Catholics prefer to withdraw from the main stream of American life, I maintain it is downright silly not to recognize that books written from a Catholic theological point of view can be called Catholic books without demeaning or disgracing anyone and that a Catholic who writes is a Catholic writer and not, as some haughtily insist, a writer who happens to be a Catholic. An intelligent adult just doesn't happen to be a Catholic—or if he does he should be ashamed to admit it—and a writer cannot help but be influenced by the most important fact in his existence: his Catholic faith.

It wasn't too long ago that most Catholic readers, although recognizing that such a thing as Catholic books existed, thought of them as badly-written, pious tracts intended for scrupulous old ladies. The heartening increase in Catholic reading has come from the discovery that such is not the case.

Many factors are responsible, including more writers, better books, and better publishing and merchandising, but the outstanding single factor, I think, was Thomas Merton's *Seven Storey Mountain.* (If it hadn't been this book it would have been another, for the time had come.) Catholics who ordinarily wouldn't be caught awake with a Catholic book read Father Merton's autobiography because it was a best seller that was being talked about. Many were shocked to find that here was a Catholic book which called for no apology—it was a good book by any standard. Intrigued by the possibility of other well-written, non-pietistic Catholic books, they investigated further and found them. The word began to spread and before long we had a small-time boom, a boom which fortunately gives the appearance of being with us for awhile and possibly continuing to grow. If any evidence is needed that Catholic books no longer can be dismissed as collections of devotional pamphlets, the current spectacle of general publishers jumping through transoms in an attempt to obtain manuscripts from Catholic writers should be rather convincing.

Lest this growing audience of Catholic readers give cause for unrestrained enthusiasm, I would like to point out that it remains relatively small compared to the millions of Catholics in America. Like most non-Catholic Americans, most Catholics don't read at all unless it be what publisher Frank Sheed has called "spitting-over-the-bridge reading," reading to pass the time or to keep from thinking. Even among those who do read, the majority are interested only in the best-seller and in their reading habits, at least, cannot be distinguished from their non-Catholic neighbors. (Some would argue this is all to the good. I disagree.)

I suggest, too, that we may have overestimated the

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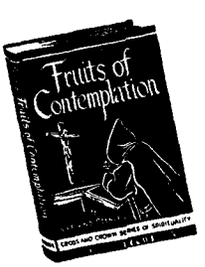

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influence of Catholic books on our fellow-Americans. Except for a rarity like *Seven Storey Mountain* and the output of a few writers like Graham Greene, Evelyn Waugh and Bruce Marshall, Catholic books have yet to reach the regular reading audience. The increased literary tempo in the Catholic field is, I suspect, unknown to most non-Catholic critics and readers. Many publishers, as I have said, are aware of it, but only because the bells on their cash registers keep ringing.

AT the moment, however, a far greater worry is the need for Catholic writers. We face the danger that, if our reading audience keeps growing, it may soon outdistance the writers and we will be treated to the unhappy spectacle of readers all ready to read and finding a fairly bare literary cupboard.

We continue to be distressingly dependent on foreign writers for the best of our Catholic literary fare. If the next version of the McCarran Act were to prohibit literary importations, we would lose Francois Mauriac, Giovanni Guareschi, Evelyn Waugh, Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, Sheila Kaye-Smith, Gerald Vann, Ronald Knox, Bruce Marshall, C. C. Martindale, Antonin Sertillanges, Daniel-Rops, Karl Stern, George Bernanos, and many, many more who are usually considered among our best. As a matter of fact, we would have far too little left, and in the field of fiction we would be paupers. More and more publishers are scanning foreign catalogues for new Catholic books and new writers, and it is no longer a secret that the more successful are the ones who do the fastest scanning, or, better still, regularly hunt and trap in Europe in person. But when you are told that new young writers don't seem to be bursting forth in Europe, either, and that it is by no means certain the balding old stand-bys will have replacements when they have done their bit, you find real reason for concern.

I wish I could present a snap solution to this problem because I believe it should have a priority among the many that face American Catholics today. We desperately need more and better Catholic writers and yet the prospects are not sufficient to encourage any but the most optimistic. It is small comfort to realize that American Catholics share the need for new writers with the rest of Americans—new faces are needed in every phase of American writing.

It seems to me that a small finger could be pointed at Catholic schools and colleges for contributing to this drought. Whatever the reason, they aren't turning out enough Catholic readers, much less Catholic writers. Possibly, the latter is not the job of schools, but I think it is. In some cases the schools don't seem to recognize the importance of creating conditions condu-

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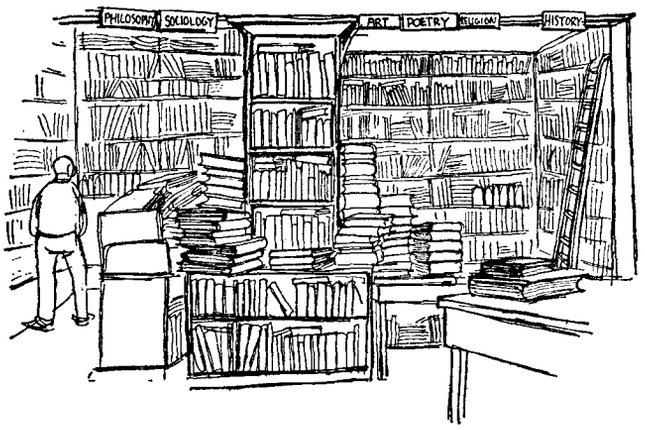
cive to drawing out young talent. In others, teachers apparently are more interested in straitjacketing or molding their students to conform than in developing individuality. The most unfortunate error, however, is overselling zeal and forgetting to stress the necessity for competence and hard work. Too many young Catholic writers have been told so often how easy it is to change the world that they are horrified to discover it is not only not easy but takes a terrific amount of sweat to even make a dent. Apostolic zeal is to be desired, but it is not a substitute for hard work. The sooner young Catholic writers learn this—and the best place to learn it is in school—the better.

Critics and reviewers too, I think must share part of the blame, particularly those who insist on overpraising anything Catholic, to the extent that our writers are deprived of the occasional kicking around they deserve and would benefit from. For example, it is rare to see an objective review of a convert autobiography. Far too often the review is devoted to welcoming the con-



vert and praising him—left unsaid may be the obvious truth that he writes like a high-school sophomore. This tendency is even stronger in reviews of spiritual writing. Many reviewers apparently do not agree with Thomas Merton that bad writing is bad writing even though it be about the love of God. (There is the other extreme, of course, that affects a hypercritical approach to any Catholic book. As yet this point of view has relatively few adherents, but even so, it seems to me the lesser evil.) Both writers and publishers are frequently getting by with the mediocre and the shoddy because too much of what passes as book reviewing in the Catholic press does not nail down bad writing. Even charity, if that is what it is, can be carried too far.

EARLIER I mentioned the by now old-hat but still durable controversies among some writers and critics as to the nature of Catholic literature, its desirability and purpose. Such discussions if kept in perspective are, of course, of interest and of value. Possibly these questions and similar ones must be settled in our

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day, but I see a growing danger in too many young Catholic writers and some of their not-too-young brethren so occupying themselves with these supersonic arguments that confusion and uncertainty result. This state of mind has helped neither the output nor the quality of modern Catholic writing. Maybe it's time to urge on these theorists the advice of Sinclair Lewis to a class of young hopefuls: If you want to be writers why don't you go home and write?

As is true in other spheres of American life, this confusion and uncertainty seem to be increasingly characteristic of the American Catholic approach to literature. A small but growing segment of intellectual Catholics who feel cut off from the main body of the Church in America are reflected in, and act as an influence on, Catholic writing. More and more this rather fluid group seems to draw in upon itself and away from the majority; except for the faith they hold in common they seem to have little respect and even less sympathy for their fellow religionists. As for the majority, they scarcely know the others exist, or, if they do, they think of them as a weird collection of fanatics.

This situation invites the twin perils of snobbism and self-pity. We can foresee this group accepting with a great show of resignation the failure of the uninitiated to appreciate them or even give them a hearing. Reasonably enough, they may find it easier to write primarily for those who will accept and applaud them, and thus may grow among American Catholics the concept of the chosen few who in despair have given up for lost the rest of the world and are content to write for and to influence each other.

Any further move in this direction will put an essential part of Catholic literature about two notches above much of modern poetry. If many of our Catholic writers lose touch with the great body of Catholic readers, consciously or unconsciously look down upon them, and feel more kinship with similar esoteric non-Catholic groups the Church will have suffered a great loss.

I don't wish to suggest that a policy of sacrificing principles, artistic or otherwise, or of consciously writing down to the "underprivileged" is in order. But can we not ask for as much tolerance for differences of opinions among Catholics as most of these same people would rightly demand for differences among races? The application of a live-and-let-live philosophy and an effort by some of our intellectuals to know and understand better the great body of American Catholics, lay and clerical, would, I believe, be of inestimable value to the Church in America. I am not maintaining that the majority is always right and the few are wrong—I am simply hoping that we do not widen the chasm that seemingly already exists between many Catholic artists and the majority of American Catholics.

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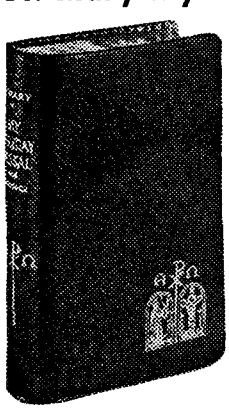

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There is always with us the so-called pious novel, seldom if ever deserving to be classed as literature no matter how general the definition, and in too many cases distressingly inept by any reasonable standards. Yet these novels have filled a need and there are still many who read them for inspiration and entertainment. This audience cannot be ignored nor does it seem fair to attempt to deprive it of what it finds helpful unless the deprivers are prepared to promote a wider appreciation for better writing and make such writing available on a popular level. We have on the one hand a body of current writing worthy of the increasing audience which it attracts and then we have "popular" Catholic writing, until now usually associated with the hack and the amateur. We will always need more writing aimed at the Catholic intellectual but I know of no good reason why the quality of popular writing cannot be improved. The possible good to be achieved is surely worth the effort.

Just as certain techniques or gimmicks are almost always found in the pious novel, so does more advanced Catholic writing tend to be characterized by certain peculiarities. Realism, even if unnecessarily dragged in, seems to be one of these, and realism-for-realism's sake may soon become the trademark of the better Catholic novel. The pious novel has almost always canonized priest characters. Almost hysterical enthusiasm, therefore, greeted writers who began to show that priests were human beings, too. But as the fashion continues and the human side of the priesthood more and more obscures the divine, the neurotic misfit priest becomes just as much of a type and just as unreal as his sanctimonious counterpart in the pious novel. Now that the novelty and the shock of seeing priests presented as alive and breathing has passed by, it might be time to jump off the new treadmill.

Perhaps this rigidity may come from an effort to depart as far as possible from the traditional American Catholic writing, much of which certainly invited a quick change of pace and direction. Many of the old shibboleths have now been discarded, however, and little is to be gained from a continued conscious reaction against the past. Being different just for the sake of being different will produce no masterpieces.

How and if the problems which confront all those interested in the future of Catholic writing and reading in America—and there are more problems than I have indicated—will be worked out is difficult to forecast. The future seems to me more hopeful than others will admit and certainly it would be a mistake to infer from the emphasis given the darker side that I minimize the progress made, or the possibility of even greater accomplishments. I hope that we will see the day when all American Catholics will be as concerned with promoting the best in reading as they are in damning the worst.

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THE STAGE

TEA AND SYMPATHY

IMPLICIT in Mr. Robert Anderson's title, with its limpid irony and quiet implication of sensibility, is the flavor and coloring of the season's first palpable hit. As a composition for the theater, "Tea and Sympathy" is entrenched in that plenitude and elegance of craft of which the American stage is sometimes capable: dramatically, it has been arranged with economy and poise; its psychology is fashionable, its "values" unexceptionable. What elevates it to serious interest is a refinement of personal feeling, and a certain *ambiance* in which Mr. Anderson has wisely permitted the play to repose. In this layer of potentiality, Elia Kazan as director, Deborah Kerr as star, and a cast of infinite resource have guilefully created the atmosphere of art. No account of the drama's inadequacies—and they are considerable and devastating—must omit the observation that here, supremely, is a play which "works."

Mr. Anderson's dish of tea, sweetened with love, is served to a troubled adolescent (again), maliciously accused of sexual inversion in an aggressively "adjusted" New England prep school. Amid so much contempt and bullying, the boy finds an ally in his housemaster's warm and responsive young wife, and together they share in innocent collusion against a system which holds the test of everything to be its durability. When the pressure grows intolerable, however, the young man turns desperately to a convenient village drab, only to have this too issue in the inevitable failure. Because the housemaster bears so much of the guilt, his wife feels a responsibility, and as the curtain falls, she alone chooses to give the boy the love elsewhere cruelly denied.

The explicit outlines of "Tea and Sympathy," so morally outrageous, do not in point of fact permit the charge. Mr. Anderson has confined himself to recording the weather of a human situation, and here the criterion must always be the quality of feeling. What disturbs, rather, is the strangely adjustable nature of the playwright's moral imagination. He approaches the public, or social, aspects of his theme with restraint and a fine, civilized intelligence, but his manipulation of personal relationships is far less fastidious. When Lillian Hellman wrote "The Children's Hour," a play of similar preoccupation and consequence, she somewhat inverted the the pattern: make a melodrama of morality. Mr. Anderson has succumbed to the melodrama of sentiment.

Mr. Anderson would appear to be the more humane; he nourishes the current mode of sentimentalism. But

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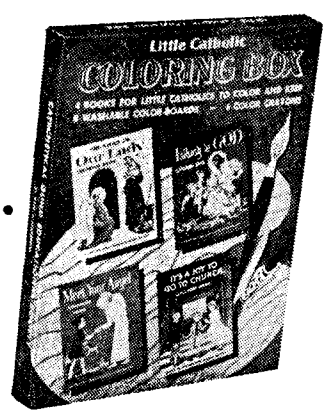

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sensitivity has again exacted its toll: the evidence is plain in the pallid language of "Tea and Sympathy," in its inability to bear the moral traffic, and the drama's neat, faintly vulgar psychology (is a single sexual act, for example, so therapeutic? will it unravel so tangled and branching a history of inferiority?). What the play lacks is any dimension of power or moral vivacity.

Miss Kerr, her phoenix-like talent risen out of the celluloid ashes, creates with a rich particularity the Burne-Jones heroine of Mr. Anderson's fantasy. Tenderness and charm in her conspire with a natural grace of spirit; they move freely out of the area of commodity and seem instead the glancing refractions of an interior life of great beauty. And John Kerr, as the besieged boy, brilliantly invokes uncommon pathos.

But Mr. Kazan, I take it, is responsible for the equilibrium of "Tea and Sympathy," the fascination of its texture. His work here is of the utmost purity and discretion. It discloses what has grown so rare in our theater, a knowledge of the life of the heart: an awareness that its history is told not in obvious strokes, but in the muted and inarticulate, the tentative, the moment of repose. That grave knowledge has been caught here in theatrical images which seem of an ineradicable beauty and eloquence. (*At the Ethel Barrymore*).

RICHARD HAYES.

THE SCREEN

NO BIZ LIKE SHOW BIZ

ALTHOUGH I am not a Gilbert and Sullivan *aficionado,* I was thoroughly engrossed by the English movie about the famous team. Sidney Gilliat (who, with Frank Launder, gave the film a handsome Technicolor production) directed "Gilbert and Sullivan" in a truly cinematic manner. It is especially successful in its scene-to-scene transitions. This is no stodgy biographical movie interspersed with musical numbers, but a lively picture in which the two main figures happen to be a librettist and a composer. While neither of these men nor Richard D'Oyly Carte, who joined them in a highly successful three-way partnership, is portrayed with any depth, the roles are played so entertainingly by Robert Morley, Maurice Evans and Peter Finch that the film bubbles with fun.

The Sullivan music, with selections from his cantatas, operas and popular operettas, was skillfully arranged and directed by Sir Malcom Sargent; and this film gives us generous scenes from the musical plays—not only the obvious ones, either. Martyn Green heads the excellent singing cast.

THAT Joan Crawford has a sensational figure and beautiful legs is made quite evident in "Torch

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Song." But why she should waste her assets and talents on this mediocre picture is not at all clear. As a temperamental musical star, Miss Crawford sings and dances all right, but not so wonderfully than one can imagine a whole show's being built around her—a show, by the way, that has some very elaborate production numbers for a supposedly simple revue.

Charles Walters, who directed "Torch Song" as if he were not quite sure where the plot was going, lets Miss Crawford establish herself as such a thoroughly unpleasant person that I didn't care how the story ended. The bored, lonely, unhappy star gets her comeuppance, of course. A blind pianist (played by a smirking Michael Wilding) supplies this and also gets stuck with the beautiful bundle of temperament at the end. Gig Young is the star's amatory side-kick, Marjorie Rambeau is her beer-drinking mother, and Henry Morgan is her long-suffering director. But "Torch Song" is all Crawford and a yard wide.

HAPPILY, "The Actress" ends before its young heroine gets on the boards and has a chance to exhibit either temper or talent. Ruth Gordon Jones (Jean Simmons) does exhibit plenty of determination and perseverance. The temperament is handled by her father, a former sea captain who has definite ideas about his daughter's future, which do not include her going on the stage. Spencer Tracy makes the most of this role and plays it in the best life-with-father tradition. In contrast, the patient, quiet mother of the household is played so well by Teresa Wright that she makes as much splash as Tracy and Simmons.

"The Actress" is a pleasant little movie of a kind that Hollywood too seldom makes with established stars. Ruth Gordon wrote the credible script (based on "Years Ago," the stage play in which she told about her own family and start in the theater), and director George Cukor succeeded in establishing a calm, unassuming mood that fits the subject matter perfectly. "The Actress" in any one of its fine scenes has more to say about the real theater than the whole of "Torch Song," for all the latter's Technicolor glamor.

PHILIP T. HARTUNG.

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The Tragedy of Private Merit in Public Incapacity

MARY TUDOR. By H. F. M. Prescott. Revised edition. Macmillan. $5.

By HELEN C. WHITE

THE sixteenth century is rich in tragic queens, and the poorest prospect for pity or romance would seem to be that one to whom folklore has given the appalling name of "Bloody Mary." It is proof of very remarkable powers, both historical and literary, that the author of *Mary Tudor* has succeeded in obtaining for her a respectful compassion that comes from sympathetic understanding, and has made the telling of her often harrowing, and almost unfailingly bleak story more engrossing than most romances. And still more remarkable, perhaps, this has been accomplished by a very sober realism of approach.

For the heart of Mary's tragedy is that far from being a monster, she was, to begin with, a very normal, even average woman, of her time and place, and perhaps most times and places. She was an attractive woman with a capacity for loving that met frustration at almost every turn. She was a physically active and stirring little body with a great interest in the personal and the concrete and no talent at all for the theoretical complications that enmeshed every moment of her existence. She was a genuinely pious woman with that aptitude for the whole and the integrated and the continuous and enduring that is the sphere of piety, and her lot was cast in a maelstrom of conflict and change.

The things she asked of life: in her youth that her father should love and hold fast to her mother, in her maturity that she might have a good husband to love and obey, and children to devote herself to, were the normal things for a woman of her age, as of any age, to want, and the pity is that it was precisely those things she could not have. Even her weakness for pretty things, for bright silks and ingeniously set jewels, was a normal one, though statesmen might smile at it and take advantage of it, as they took advantage of everything human in their heartless dealing with her. And most of all, her zeal for maintaining the observance of the recognized and established order of life in little things and great is the basis of all the good housekeeping for which civilized men have looked to women.

In other words, given anything like an even chance, Mary was the stuff of which a happy wife and mother and good relative and neighbor might have been made, and the pity of it is that the daughter of Henry VIII and Katherine of Aragon could never have even half that chance. Shakespeare saw clearly the tragedy of private merit in public incapacity. Miss Prescott has developed the theme with the added resources of more recent meditations on the shattering impact of conflicts between the heart's most intimate loyalties, and the corrosive effects of unremitting frustration and disillusionment such as was the lot of Mary, but while taking advantage of modern psychology, she has known how to subordinate her techniques to the intuitions of imagination. The result is the most important thing in a biography, and the hardest to achieve: a living and convincing human being.

And that living human being is set in a very impressive context. The stir and the drama, the raw color and passionate brilliance of the Tudor age, warm a sophisticated and extraordinarily well-documented analysis of a very complicated historical situation. Miss Prescott has grasped very well the exceedingly complex character of the Protestant Reformation in England, doing justice to a wide range of factors from popular social restlessness to the financial problems of a new nobility and a Renaissance kingship still trying to make shift with medieval fiscal provisions, to say nothing of such constants as the popular suspicion of foreigners and the by no means ungrounded fear of foreign domination.

Fair as the author is in assessing all these factors, and brilliantly as she presents their bewildering interplay, she never quite succeeds, in the judgment of this reader, in doing justice to the higher reaches of religious insight and feeling that do now and then flash out of the confused story of the time. But it would be very hard to do that and maintain the over-all proportions of what is a remarkably balanced presentation.

The reading of this tragedy reminds one afresh of the irreversibleness of historical process and yet the inexorable persistence of historical event. One cannot undo the past, or restore the past, but neither can one escape its influence. The author, in reminding one so impressively of these constants, establishes the context of the political problem which it would have taken a much greater genius than poor Mary to solve.

But if this, like all distinguished historical works, is a sobering book to read, it is also a fascinating one, thanks to the author's power of invoking the look and feel of a vanished moment, and of summing up a very complicated matter in a pithy sentence or two. A very terrible example of the first is the description of the impact of the persecution: "Women at their marketing, men at their daily trade, the cobbler at his bench, the ploughman trudging the furrow—all learnt to know the awful smell of burning human flesh, the flesh of a neighbor, of a man or woman as familiar as the parish pump. Mingling with the steam of washing day, or with the reek of autumn bonfires, or polluting the sweetness of June, that stench of human burning became a matter of everyday experience. Such an experience, even in a cruel age, left behind it a memory and a disgust." While that sentence implies that more people came into direct contact with the burnings than can have been geographically possible, it also suggests the impact of the collective experience.

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of summary, a good example is the comment on Mary's confrontation of her Council, on one of a long series of critical occasions: "So an outspoken downright woman, who could understand no policy but saw all things written clear in terms of right and wrong, addresses a company of the most corrupt, time-serving, and unscrupulous men that ever sat around the Council Board at Whitehall." Only an expert on all English history could vouch for the comparative aspects of that statement, but it puts in a nutshell the tragedy of Mary's political life.

Reverence for Life and Death

A HANDFUL OF BLACKBERRIES. By Ignazio Silone. Translated by Darina Silone. Harper. $3.50.

By WILLIAM P. CLANCY

IN 1927 Ignazio Silone and Palmiro Togliatti went to Moscow as the Italian representatives at a special session of the Communist International. Silone was disillusioned, sick, at what he learned there. Afterwards, in Switzerland, Togliatti tried to reassure him: "The forms of Proletarian Revolution were not arbitrary," Togliatti argued. "If they did not accord with our prejudices, so much the worse for us." Silone's reply to his friend was not very coherent, he says, "mainly because Togliatti's arguments were purely political, whereas the agitation which my recent experiences aroused in me went far beyond politics."

Silone's agitations (and they have been many) have all gone beyond politics, beyond abstractions, and beyond ideologies to reach his ultimate and perhaps only concern, which is "the superiority of the human person over all the economic and social mechanisms which oppress him." And as the years have gone by, Silone tells us, there has been added to this concern "an intuition of man's dignity and a feeling of reverence for that which in man is always trying to outdistance itself, and lies at the root of his eternal disquiet."

The human person; man's dignity; reverence; eternal disquiet: these things brought the young Silone into the Party and led the matured Silone out of it; they are the basis of his present Socialism, and they are the distinction of his art. Eliot has reminded us that we can apply only literary criteria to determine whether a work is "literature" but that to determine its *greatness* as literature we must apply other tests—ethical, philosophical, theological. Silone's novels, like his politics, go beyond their genre. They are informed by his ultimate concern and his added intuition. They are great art because they go beyond "art."

A key to all of them is provided in Silone's observation on an earthquake which destroyed a large part of his province and killed about fifty thousand of its people in 1915: "I was surprised," he has written, "to see how much my fellow-villagers took this appalling catastrophe as a matter of course. The geologists' complicated explanations, reported in the newspapers, aroused their contempt. In a district like ours, where so many injustices go unpunished, people regarded the recurrent earthquakes as a phenomenon requiring no further explanation. In fact, it was astonishing that earthquakes were not more frequent. An earthquake buries rich and poor, learned and illiterate, authorities and subjects alike beneath its ruined houses. . . . An earthquake achieves what the law promises but does not in practice maintain—the equality of all men."

The hero of Silone's novels is always this Italian peasant, unterrified by earthquakes, and their setting is always this Abbruzean village; in them he finds a universal theme: man's fortitude—extended to stoicism—in the face of suffering, and man's thirst after justice, his "eternal disquiet."

In *A Handful of Blackberries* the Fascists are gone from the village and the Communists have taken their place. The gramophone in the public square which used to play

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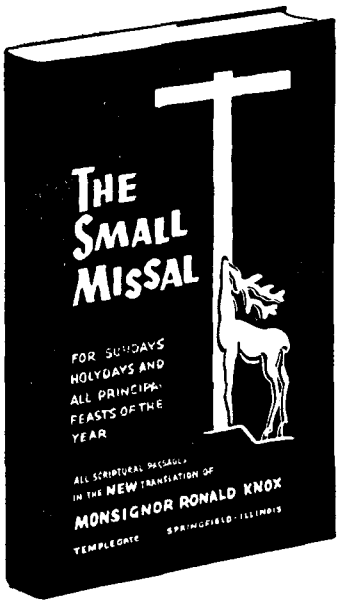
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"Giovinezza" now blares forth "The Internationale." Many things which were crimes under the old regime have now become virtues. But the peasant is not surprised at all this. Earthquakes come and go; his valley remains. He plows the fields, sweats in the heat, is numb with cold, loves and begets children—and waits.

A Handful of Blackberries tells the story of the coming of the Party to Silone's valley in 1946. It is concerned, in its story-line, with a young engineer, Rocco de Donatis, and his sweetheart, Stella. Rocco, thirsting for justice, had become a Communist in his youth. Stella, for the same reason, had become one too. They meet when Rocco comes to the valley to organize the peasants and suppress deviations from the party line. But, shortly after his coming, Rocco is sent to Russia. He then *sees* the Revolution. And so it is only a question of time before his native decency triumphs over his ideological regularity. (For what agitates him is "beyond politics.") When he returns to the valley he breaks with the Party. The bulk of the story concerns his and Stella's struggles as the Party attempts to ruin them.

This looks, on the surface, like a "political novel." But I don't think that the political label fits it, except in a very special sense. The politics are almost accidental to Silone's real concern. "On a group of theories one can found a school," he has said, "but on a group of values one can found a culture, a civilization, a new way of living together among men." His concern here, as always, is with values as they inhere in the peasant life of which he writes. They are pagan values, in the proper, classical sense, and for them Silone feels a classical piety. His work is a twentieth century version of Pastoral. It celebrates, and reverences, life at its most enduring roots. Politics? Theories? History? What are these in face of the mystery of life and death, and of man's endurance in meeting it?

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perpetual fear of their oppressors and must be kept hidden. At the end of *A Handful of Blackberries* it has been hidden from the Communists —and lost.

"Can't it ever be found again?" Stella asks the trumpeter.

"How can I know?" he replies. "It doesn't depend on me, you know. Maybe next year, or twenty or five hundred years from now."

But the trumpeter is sure it *will,* some day, reappear. Life goes on, even during the night, and the peasants' thirst will someday be satisfied. Confronted with such faith, who can fail to share Silone's reverence?

Poetry As Passion

CHOIR OF MUSES. By Etienne Gilson. Translated by Maisie Ward. Sheed & Ward. $3.50.

By JOHN W. SIMONS

EVERYONE knows that Dante had a "muse" and that her name was Beatrice. But it has sometimes been asserted that a muse, in order to exert an influence, need have no corporeal existence. This was the belief of the late Père Mandonnet with regard to Beatrice, and it set M. Etienne Gilson's teeth on edge. In *Dante the Philosopher* Gilson angrily refuted the offending cleric, but the idea of the "muse" —of *musa ut sic*—continued to fascinate. *Heloise and Abelard* and *Petrarch and His Muse* might be considered as reconnaissance flights over Parnassus. The full scale attack is given to us in Maisie Ward's deft translation of *L'Ecole des Muses.*

It is the duty of a muse, according to Gilson, simply to be a muse, that is, to set up responses in the "bemused" which are propitious to creation. Once the muse steps outside her fated orbit, or once the artist establishes an extracurricular relationship with his muse, the center falls apart. Art is notoriously a vampire. It not only consumes the artist; it consumes all it needs of the artist's experience and blithely discards the rest. Goethe and Wagner, among those whom Gilson discusses,

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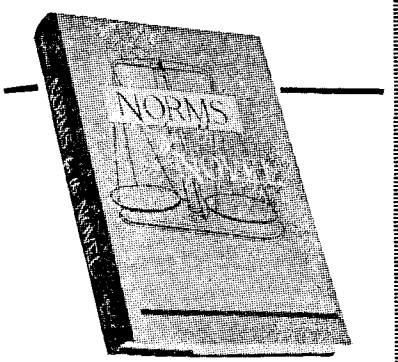

Norms for the Novel

By
Harold C. Gardiner, S.J.
Literary Editor of AMERICA

A book-length discussion of the principles by which fiction may be judged.

● There are two problems which face the professional critic of the novel and the amateur critic, who is the reader. If the novel deals with moral problems—and any serious novel does—what are the norms for moral evaluation? Further, apart from the moral evaluation, how shall the critic judge the novel simply as a work of art? Are these two sets of criteria independent? Do they influence one another? What should one expect to gain from reading novels?

These and other questions are treated by Father Gardiner in *Norms for the Novel,* which is a greatly expanded and revised edition of his well-known booklet, *Tenets for Readers and Reviewers,* first issued in 1942.

Though the bulk of Father Gardiner's discussion deals with the modern novel, the reader will find here a body of principles which will help deepen his appreciation of any creative literature. The book may well be called a *seminarium,* a "seedbed" of fruitful ideas on creative reading.

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seem to have had the clearest realization of this.

Both muse and artist, outside their respective vocations, are only flesh and blood. Artists have been known to be petulant and unkempt, muses to be illiterate and dowdy. The relationship between them, since it is not one of abstract essences, has great possibilities for both comedy and tragedy. Gilson's half dozen excursions into artist-muse relationships pretty well runs the gamut. Some will think, perhaps, that Auguste Comte, who passes in history for a philosopher rather than an artist, is an interloper on Parnassus. But positivism, though in itself the dreariest of philosophies, emerges from Comte steeped in poetry and passion. It is at once the sublimation and transmutation of his love for Clotilde. With Maeterlinck we have the other side of the farce. His Georgette had the effrontery to claim co-authorship.

The other relationships explored are those between Petrarch and Laura, Baudelaire and Mme. Sabatier, Wagner and Mathilde, and Goethe and Lili. Into these tangled relationships Gilson enters with sympathy and detachment, summoning a nimble scholarship to his aid. In a preface to the French edition, which Miss Ward has not seen fit to include in her translation, the author states that his approach will not be that of the philosopher or historian in the stricter sense. He comes to his subject with "une sympathique et reconnaissante curiosité."

But, even though the tone of these essays is much lighter than we normally expect of M. Gilson, we can be sure that he is not given to otiose enterprises. The last two chapters in particular—"Art and Eros" and "The Artist and the Saint"—are filled with rewarding insights and provocative judgments. Here is one of the insights. "To serve God through art is all the more difficult because the urge towards perfection always alive in the heart of the genuine artist is an irresistible temptation to serve art as if it were a god." When a philosopher invades Parnassus he usually sends up flak. M. Gilson sends up flares.

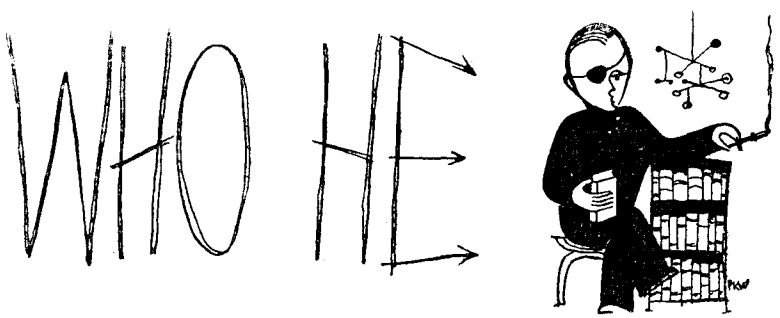
The Weight of Pain

THE PASSIONATE HEART. By Beatrix Beck. Translated by Constantine Fitz Gibbon. Messner. $3.50.

By JEAN HOLZHAUER

NOVELS concerned with problems of religion are comparatively rare in these days, and such novels which are also well written even rarer. Communism, materialism, secularism — whatever the definition we seize upon for the way the wind blows — erodes the religious sensibility; one should not berate writers for failure to reflect situations and decisions of which they themselves are wholly innocent.

The mold of most "religious novels" we have is usually one of such banality that its characters differ only in their vocabularies and the occasional attitudes they strike from the cast of any third-rate movie. Miss Beatrix Beck, however, has broken through the pattern with this quiet



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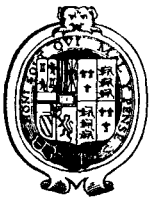
and unpretentious meditation on the dichotomies of the natural and the supernatural, to win the *Prix Goncourt.*

Under its rather unfortunate title, *The Passionate Heart* tells in the first person the story of a young French widow and her child in the months immediately preceding the Liberation. Active in the Resistance, the widow, Barney, is anti-clerical and sympathetic with her Communist allies. In a moment of exhaustion and disgust with Rightist Catholic maneuvers, she finds her way to a church, intending to vent her hostility by insulting a priest.

Her selection of her victim is meticulous and cunning: not the pastor, who will probably be too old to be much upset by her attack; not the first curate, whose name, Philippe Demanoir, on the door of his confessional, looks "middle class"; but the second curate, Leon Morin, doubtless a peasant. She watches from a pew as Morin, "a small, dull looking man," enters the confessional, and in a few minutes is beside him. "Religion is the opiate of the people," she hisses in his ear. "Not exactly," says Morin, in a quite natural tone, as though going on with a conversation already begun. In that whispered exchange, the direction of Barney's life is altered and her doom sealed: she is to come reluctantly to a correct assessment of her worth.

This unwelcome dénouement is reached painfully, over a period of months, in conversations with Father Morin. "My entire life, even in its most trivial aspects, was becoming divine. The ink pad, the date stamp, the buttonhook, the broom, the iron, the kitchen knife—all became saintly objects, the companions and allies of my redemption. The tearing of a page from the calendar was an act of homage to my Creator: I offered Him both yesterday and today."

Partly because of Morin's state in life, partly because of the matter-of-fact, intellectual character of their conversations, it does not occur to Barney that her redemption has overtones of homage to Father Morin as well. One is certain that the possibility occurs to him. It alters not at all his scale of personal absolutes; he neither mentions it nor finds



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it necessary to break off, on some pretext, their conversations. When at last Barney understands and foolishly forces the issue ("I'm asking you seriously. I must know. If you were not a priest, would you take me to be your wife?"), he is able to answer ("Yes."), "and with a single gesture, a single movement, he had given me everything and taken everything away."

A little later, after the Liberation, both are notified to transfer from the small village which has been their Occupation home. She goes to say goodbye. *"Au revoir,"* he says, and he has never seemed to her more gay. "Mind you don't fall over the packing cases." His laughter as she leaves, she tells us, is as hard as a blow.

She concludes, "I walked through the silent night of God, hastening like those Arabian donkeys whose masters keep an open sore on their flanks to make them go the better."

The outline of this simple central plot is picked out in colors kept carefully neutral, against a background of dislocation, meanness, suffering for want of food and rest, and the constant irritation of sheltering Jewish refugees in primitive accommodations and personal incompatibility. Barney's daughter falls ill, her office colleagues make impossible demands, the successive occupation troops are loutish and brutal. One can never be sure, as Barney herself is in the end not sure, how much the religious conversion which charges these difficulties with meaning is the product of a natural hunger for beauty and significance, and how much it is a genuine bridge to God. One cannot even be sure it will endure. The vision of Barney plodding through the silent night like a suffering Arabian donkey is therefore as moving as any chance and sudden glimpse of humanity flayed raw in its eternal, human predicament: is there everything to gain, or, after all, nothing? What is the weight of pain?

Beatrix Beck, who is, incidentally, a former secretary of the late André Gide, does not pretend to have the answer. One must be grateful that she has the taste and the perception to so accurately put the question.

The Region of American Literature

SOUTHERN RENASCENCE: The Literature of the Modern South. *Edited by Louis D. Rubin and Robert D. Jacobs.* Johns Hopkins. $5.

By PATRICK F. QUINN

HOW large an audience this book will have depends on the degree to which an assumption is accepted and a fact recognized. The assumption is that modern American literature is worth reading and worth discussing. The fact is that most of this literature has been written by Southerners.

The assumption must remain a matter of opinion, but the fact need not, and one of the contributors to this volume nails it down with quick, statistical finality. The sociologist Howard Odum reports that in the last fifty years Southern writers have added no less than five thousand titles to the national lit-

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erary stockpile, that eight Pulitzer awards have gone to Southern novelists, and that of eleven best sellers which have approached or exceeded the one-million mark, ten were by Southern authors. These figures are impressive, but they tend to suggest that the literature of the modern South, as a subject for inquiry, is best suited to the talents of an adding machine operator who can double in graphs.

There are no graphs in this book, and few statistics, for the editors are interested less in the quantity of Southern writing than in its quality. They make no attempt, therefore, at amorphous, encyclopedic coverage of the subject. Instead, they present a kind of intensive survey, written mostly by literary critics who are mostly Southerners, who prefer to discuss Faulkner, for instance, rather than Margaret Mitchell.

Although a majority of the twenty-six contributors evidently share this preference, the thin, shrill note of special pleading is seldom heard. The book records a wide range of opinions and covers a good deal of ground. Inevitably, with so many hands at work, the results are uneven. But most books are uneven; all anthologies are. This one has its arid and irrelevant moments, but not often. As a whole, it is a solid piece of work, well organized throughout, sometimes brilliant, and always readable.

The discussion begins with a broad and difficult topic, "The Mind of the South." The book might well have come to grief right here, set adrift in a fog of platitudes or snagging on some merely crotchety generalizations. But the opening essays by Heilman and Weaver avoid both dangers, and thanks mainly to them this first section of the volume is an excellent one. A less general topic, "The Themes of Southern Literature," is broached next. This should have been made the vital center of the book. However, the discussion here becomes diffuse, and the topic is never quite held in focus. Particular examples of Southern writing are examined and appraised in the two concluding sections, "The Novelists of the South," and "The Poetry of the South." Most of the essayists re-

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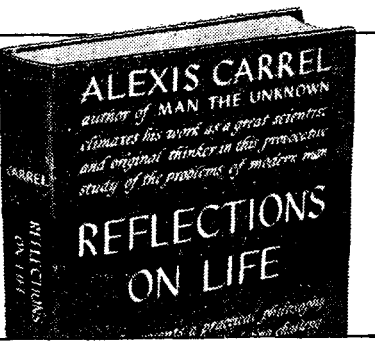

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cruited for the book are at work under these two headings. As one might expect, there are several pieces on Faulkner and Robert Penn Warren, the stars of the show. But there are some valuable studies of other subjects, too, for instance the essays on Ellen Glasgow, Erskine Caldwell, and *So Red the Rose*.

The book ends abruptly, and tamely, with a brief for the poetry of Merrill Moore. Missing is a strong, final essay that would at least endeavor to sum up the whole discussion. A coda of this sort might be a merely mechanical affair or routine flourish in some other book. But *Southern Renascence,* despite its varied authorship, forms a coherent whole. In this way the book resembles what the book is about, for if modern Southern writing is not *all* of one piece it is unusually homogeneous. (A similar survey of the literature of the modern North is unthinkable.) Whether they are regionalists by instinct or by program, most Southern writers share a community of beliefs, attitudes, and concerns. Without getting into one another's way, they often write about the same subjects and explore the same themes. Though many of the essays in *Southern Renascence* are individually rewarding, a summation of their separate findings at the end of the book would have brought the whole enterprise to a more satisfying conclusion.

Formosa Tragedy

A PAIL OF OYSTERS. By Vern Sneider. Putnam. $3.50.

By WILLIAM PFAFF

POLITICS and art usually mix about as well as oil and water. André Malraux wrote a book about oriental politics and the Chinese Nationalists (in the days when they were uneasy allies of the Chinese Communists) and he made a rare, great novel, *Man's Fate*. One is here reminded of Malraux, because the talented Vern Sneider has taken up the Chinese Nationalist situation thirty years after.

Whether or not you hold with old Epictetus that man is nothing but a "soul dragging a corpse around" read . . .

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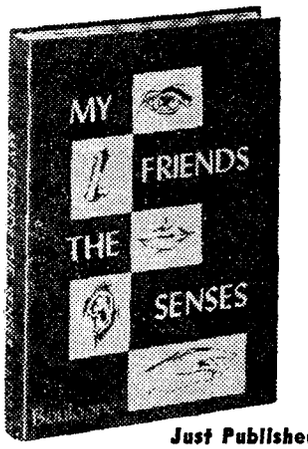

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And now it is not the revolt of the Communists and Nationalists against the old order, but the revolt of the Formosan subject peoples of the Nationalists against certain sections, at least, of the Nationalist Government.

The scene is Formosa's capital, Taipei. A young oyster farmer, a descendant of the aborigines of Taiwan, searches for his family idol, which was stolen by soldiers of the Nationalist garrison. A brother and sister who had been bought from a poor family by a rich and childless Formosan, the boy to be his son and heir, the girl to be another of the many prostitutes this man owns, run away from this father-owner to find lives of their own. The three meet in Taipei and fall in with an American journalist, more accurately identified as the conscience of Vern Sneider. Under the tyranny of the Nationalist government, the three go to various and tragic fates. The journalist goes home to write the truth about Formosa.

The truth, Mr. Sneider says, is that Formosa is ruled by an alien dictatorship. It is a dictatorship because the dominant figures in the present government are Communist-trained, and still see the world in Communist terms as divided between the all-righteous and the enemy. Things are now reversed, however, and the righteous are me and thee, brother, and the enemies are the Communists, defined as all who disagree with me and thee. This leaves the native Formosans, ruled by this alien government and yet not Communists, in an impossible position. Mr. Sneider says that Formosan patriots claim that there is a liberal element within the Nationalist government which at present is out of favor. This group has accomplished much good in Formosa, and if it were to come to full power could create a Nationalist government resembling the liberal democracies of the West, which would give the Formosan people respect and self government, and would be able to rally the support of the powerful overseas Chinese groups scattered throughout Asia who now dislike both Communist and Nationalist regimes.

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This reviewer cannot evaluate the truth of Mr. Sneider's argument. It is reasonable in the framework of news dispatches from Formosa, and Mr. Sneider writes from personal investigation, but the argument obviously rests on factual points which only one who knows Formosa can verify. If it is true, then there is hope in the polemic-swept Formosan situation, and the United States is in a position to realize that hope.

I have written at length about the politics of this novel, because the politics are the justification and chief interest of the book. As a work of art, *A Pail of Oysters* is distinctly minor. It is, I think, almost impossible for a westerner to write a convincing novel about Asians, because such a novel must sound interior depths, and convey a cultural conditioning, which are almost beyond the comprehension of an occidental. Perhaps a man born a westerner but educated in Asia, who has lived in the villages in the company of Asians, could succeed. But there are few Lafcadio Hearns. Even Malraux's success was due, more than one might think, to the fact that his hero was French-Japanese, and the ideologies of *Man's Fate* were those of the West.

But Sneider has done as well as anyone could expect. His characters are thin, but the scenes, the sounds and street noises are those of Asia. The westerners' press club polity of pink gin, gossip, and tired incomprehension is convincing. It is an interesting and good book, not as good as Sneider's first, *The Teahouse of the August Moon,* but good. And it says with real passion something about a part of the world which Americans have all but given up trying to understand.

REVIEWERS

Helen C. White, Professor of English at the University of Wisconsin, is the author of *The Metaphysical Poets, Watch in the Night,* and other books.

Father John W. Simons teaches at St. Charles Seminary, Overbrook, Pennsylvania.

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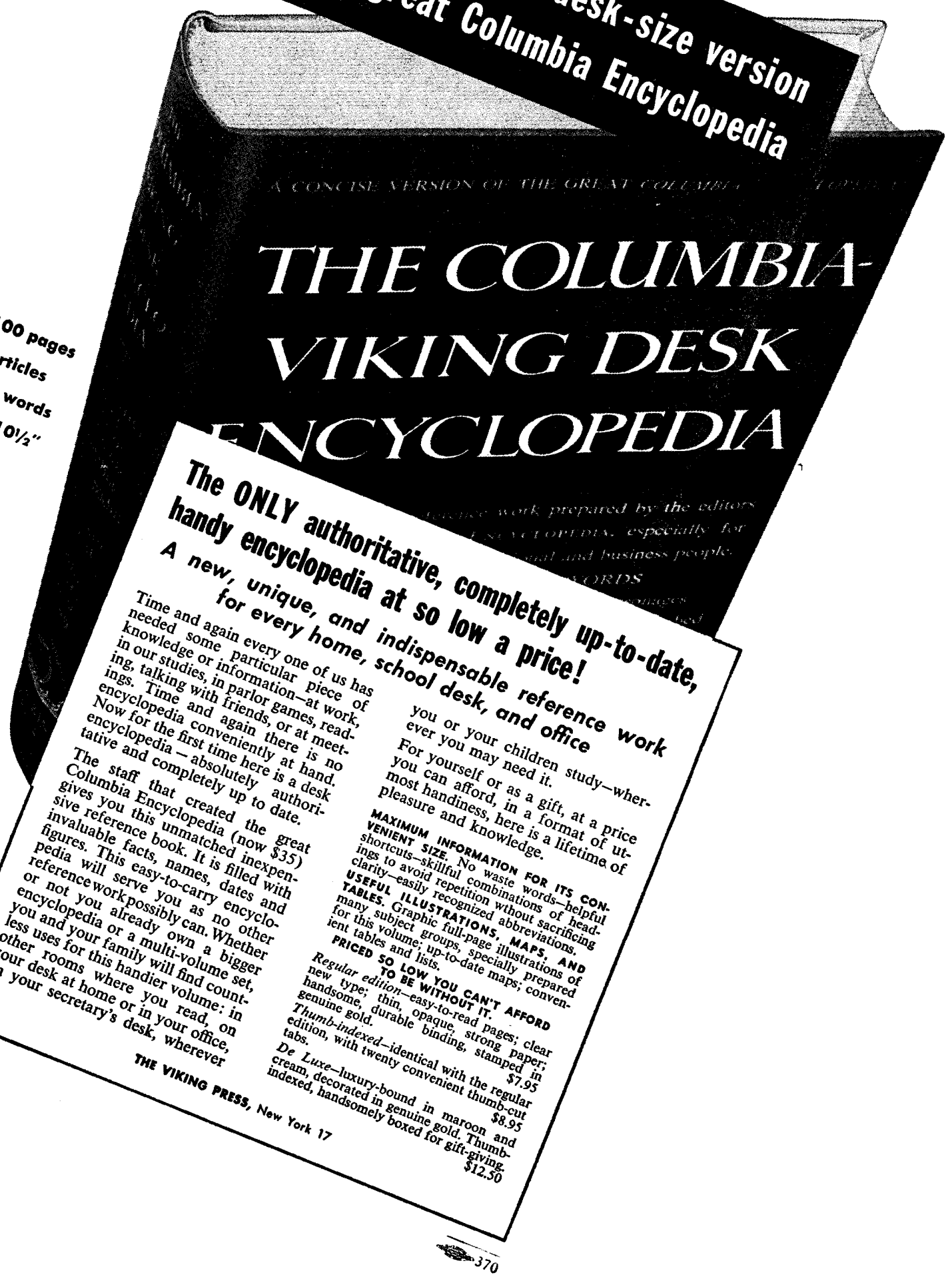

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